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# PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS

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## NEWER METHODS OF CONTROLLING DIPHTHERIA.

The excellent results obtained by Park with routine Schick tests and the subsequent active immunization of susceptible individuals with toxin-antitoxin mixtures should lead to the wider use of these procedures for the administrative control of diphtheria. The attention of State and municipal health officers is therefore called to the article on page 1063 describing the outfits supplied by various manufacturers of biological products for making Schick tests and for actively immunizing with toxin-antitoxin mixtures. The widespread use of the procedures mentioned, especially where diphtheria is at all prevalent, would constitute a distinct advance in the present methods of controlling this disease.

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## WORK OF RED CROSS ORGANIZATIONS IN RELATION TO THE PREVENTIVE MEDICINE OF THE FUTURE.<sup>1</sup>

By SIR ARTHUR NEWSHOLME, K. C. B.

It is difficult to give, as I am invited to do, in brief space and without the detailed reports of proceedings in which I took part, a clear conception of the conclusions reached at the extremely important International Conference of Red Cross Societies which was held in Cannes during April of this year.

I shall endeavor, however, to state the conception which gave rise to the conference and to give some of the conclusions reached by the experts in a number of departments of medicine on which are being based the initial steps for the organization of a new departure in Red Cross work.

It is unnecessary to remind actual Red Cross workers of the vast amount of beneficent work, rendered possible by the gifts of possibly half of the American population, which has been carried out by your agencies in the various belligerent countries. The record of saving of life, of alleviation of suffering, and, in other instances, of prevention of greater suffering is one calling for gratitude and congratulation. This work has been rendered possible by an unrivaled com-

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<sup>1</sup> Address delivered at a meeting called by the American Red Cross, Washington, D. C., May 2, 1919.

bination of trained and of relatively untrained workers. The trained workers were indispensable; but without the invaluable assistance of intelligent previously untrained voluntary workers, a vast mass of suffering would have been left unalleviated and unrelieved.

This work, in the main, has been directed toward the healing of the sick and wounded, but not entirely so; for most interesting and valuable work has been done among the civilian population of the belligerent countries in providing medical assistance, in special work for the treatment of tuberculosis, in securing medical assistance and advice for mothers and their children, and in caring for those who have been rendered homeless by ruthless war. In America also, Dr. Clark informs me, around military camps in States in which public health administration is imperfect, an organization has been evolved, through cooperation between the Federal Public Health Service and the American Red Cross, by means of which territories about camps have been "cleaned up," the risks of malaria and other communicable diseases, including venereal diseases, have been minimized, a good milk supply has been assured, and elementary sanitation established. It is evident, therefore, that already the Red Cross, when local sanitary arrangements were imperfect or in abeyance, has taken upon itself the burden of the emergency preventive measures as well as of measures of relief.

In so doing it has acted wisely. Preventive work is always more productive in results than relief work. It is also more economical. It is wiser as well as more humane to erect a parapet along the top of a dangerous cliff than to provide an ambulance at its base.

I do not, however, wish to give countenance to the notion that prevention and treatment of disease must be regarded in antithesis. The two are parts of a whole and not distinct and separate. This may be illustrated by two of the most serious diseases to which humanity is subject, tuberculosis and syphilis. Of these, tuberculosis is probably the chief producer of dependent widows and orphans, while syphilis, on the authority of Sir William Osler, must be regarded as third among the killing diseases. For the prevention of both of these diseases treatment forms an indispensable measure. Every arrangement conducing to the comfort or recovery of the tuberculosis patient diminishes the risk of massive infection in his family; and the prompt treatment of syphilis by arsenobenzol preparations is the most effective means for securing the patient's immediate disinfection as well as his progress toward cure.

And even when the elementary personal infection is absent, it can be argued with justice that the prompt and efficient medical treatment and nursing of the sick not only diminish the duration of individual disability, but prevent the impoverishment and enfeeblement of other members of the same family.

But for an increasing proportion of the total sickness of humanity, total prevention is now possible, and I need scarcely cite the almost complete disappearance of typhus in western nations in peace time, the rapid decline of enteric fever, and the improvement in regard to a large number of other diseases. The number of preventable diseases is being steadily increased, as investigation progresses, and as our knowledge of the already ascertained laws of health increases and becomes disseminated among the general population.

It was, therefore, a happy inspiration of Mr. Davison, the president of the American Red Cross, which led to his calling together the international conference of Red Cross Societies at Cannes, with a view to considering means by which the world-wide activities of Red Cross workers might be utilized for the prevention of illness as well as for the treatment of sick and wounded mankind. It is a vision of the future, which, I think, will have a great influence on the welfare of mankind, if, as I am confident will be the case, the conception fires the souls of the multitude of Red Cross workers and contributors in every civilized country, and leads them to determine against demobilization of their forces and to continue their beneficent activities against the horrors of peace, which, in the aggregate, are even more serious to mankind than those of war.

The statement that the devastations produced by disease in times of peace are even greater than the loss of life from war, may be illustrated by the experience of England and Wales. In the four years, 1911-1914, immediately preceding the World War, 2,036,466 persons died in England and Wales; while, according to official figures, the total loss of men, during the four and one-fourth years of war, was 835,743, including 161,800 presumed dead. The war figures give the entire loss for the British Empire; but it can not be far from the truth to state that war on the gigantic scale of the war from which we have just emerged has killed in Great Britain about one-third as many as have died in the civilian population in a corresponding period. I do not lose sight of the fact that a large proportion of the civilian deaths occur in ripe old age, and that 28 per cent of the total civilian deaths occur among children under 5, while those destroyed by war are adults and the most virile of our race. But the greater part of the deaths in childhood, as well as in adult life, before old age is reached, are preventable; and in the future will be prevented, given adequate research, intelligent and unsparing application of knowledge already in our possession, and an avoidance of the public parsimony which in relation to public health constitutes the most serious form of extravagance. That is the ideal which Mr. Davison and his collaborators place before us; and it was to devise plans to this end and to enlist the continued cooperation of all Red Cross workers that the conference was called at Cannes.

The conference held a number of general meetings in which the general policy to be pursued was discussed, and then divided itself into sections dealing with the following subjects: Preventive medicine, child welfare, tuberculosis, malaria, venereal diseases, nursing, information, and statistics. These sections were not selected as covering the entire ground of preventive medicine, but as forming branches of work in which early investigation and action appeared to be most desirable.

But first of all the lines of general policy were discussed. It is evident that, although measures for the prevention of disease constitute a definite governmental function, neglect of which is treason to the communal welfare, even in the more advanced countries our governing bodies have not lived up to their potentialities. In scarcely a single sphere of its work can it be said of any government or of any local authority that what could be done to prevent disease and to avoid human suffering has been completely accomplished. To say this is merely to express the imperfections of humanity, singly, or the greater imperfections of committees and councils intrusted with the public purse and the public weal.

There is, and I think always will be, ample scope for supplementation of official work by voluntary workers, for the experimentation in new and promising work which it is so difficult to initiate in official circles, and for the undertaking of necessary work by devoted volunteers when public opinion and officialdom refuse to undertake it.

This disposes of the argument that Red Cross activities in the prevention of disease merely prevent the development of official work. The true object of all voluntary workers is to stimulate official public-health work, and, when in any sphere the latter is fully developed, to welcome the disappearance or reduction of voluntary nonofficial work, or seek the new means of social help which are always waiting for devoted workers to initiate.

The conference agreed that the new work of the Red Cross would naturally divide itself into two parts, an international bureau and national organizations. The duties of these and their relation to each other will be more clearly seen in the light of experience. The international bureau in the scheme proposed for the consideration of the conference, and which received general approval, would act as a great center for collecting information on various public-health subjects, and for digesting it and, subsequently, for distributing it by means of special publications, or periodical journals, or on application from those requiring specialized information. It would also act as a means of educating the general public on urgent problems affecting its welfare; and it would be utilized as a center, organizing in less favored communities missions which would undertake local investigations and remedial work. These surveys and activities

would be intended rather as demonstration centers than as permanent organizations, the intention being to withdraw them as soon as the necessary work could be carried on by local Red Cross or other organizations.

It was suggested that the central bureau should comprise a number of branches dealing with epidemic diseases, tuberculosis, venereal diseases, child welfare, nursing, and other subjects; collating and analyzing information and distributing it through the medium of the National Red Cross of each country.

Such a central bureau, it will, I think, be agreed, will be of the greatest value to all social and public-health workers, while not clashing with any existent agency.

The proposed organization of Red Cross agencies for preventive work has already received an imprimatur in the draft of the league of nations; and it would be appropriate that its headquarters should be near, if not side by side with, the future home of that league. If it receives the full development for which we hope, it will form, perhaps, a chief instrument in securing peace and continued happiness for mankind.

The relation of the central bureau to National Red Cross societies will be one of mutual cooperation. The central bureau will provide information and facilities for national work; the actual work will need to be carried out in each country nationally and in the main from funds supplied by that country.

It is not intended that the National Red Cross shall undertake, much less compete with, work already being carried out either by local authorities or by existing voluntary work. If, for instance, there is a society concerning itself with child welfare, or the prevention of tuberculosis, or of venereal diseases, the National Red Cross would naturally give such assistance as it could through its voluntary workers in this special work, while leaving untouched existing arrangements. If no such societies existed the National Red Cross might advantageously assist in their formation, retiring as soon as the separate organization was working.

In countries in which official and existent voluntary agencies scarcely exist, more active work of the Red Cross organization will be called for; in such countries assistance may be needed from the central international bureau.

Evidently there are many points of central and national administration requiring and now receiving fuller and more detailed information, and all that need now be said is that it appears to me certain that international and national Red Cross organizations which will concern themselves with the prevention of disease as well as with the relief of suffering will be formed, and that they will have great influence in hastening the reduction of human disease.

The second week's deliberations of the conference at Cannes were filled with meetings of committees of experts and more formal sectional meetings, at which lines of policy on certain specific subjects were formulated for the later deliberations of Red Cross societies in Geneva.

It is unnecessary to summarize in detail the scientific recommendations reached in various subjects. It may suffice, as indicating the wide scope of the field of work about to be surveyed, that among the more urgent problems of preventive medicine, priority was given to advocacy of combined efforts for the prevention of the major ills of mankind, of the provision of laboratory assistance in the diagnosis of disease, and of securing more accurate vital statistics and improvements in public-health legislation.

In child-welfare work, the importance of health visiting, of child-welfare centers, of an improved midwifery service, and of continuous observation of children under school age as well as of scholars was emphasized.

In regard to tuberculosis, stress was laid on the essential points that measure against this disease. The scope of this work must embrace the whole of the sick lifetime of the patient, and must include, when necessary, measures for obviating the results arising from the fact that the partially recovered patient commonly is unable to earn an economic wage.

In the prevention of venereal diseases a similarly wide outlook was advocated, including the necessary social and moral as well as medical measures against their spread.

In the preceding brief statement I have endeavored to indicate the main outlines of the proposals considered by the Cannes conference. My statements are merely those of a participant in the conference; and it is evident that outside of the momentous decision to endeavor to retain the forces of Red Cross organizations and to secure their assistance in the great impending struggle against disease no final decisions have been made. The growth of the central and of each of the national organizations in the desired direction must necessarily occupy time, though I believe development will be rapid once the great ideal is visualized clearly by Red Cross workers in each country.

I have referred in an earlier part of these remarks to the imperfections of governments, central and local, in the control of disease. These imperfections indicate one of the most promising fields in which voluntary agencies like the Red Cross can assist toward greater efficiency. Both local and central authorities are elected by the people themselves and the laws and regulations for the promotion of the public health—and what is even more important, the enforcement of existing regulations—depend for their efficiency

on public opinion which we can all assist in forming. The natural tendency on the part of the social enthusiast who has been disappointed in his efforts at reform is either to retire from the fight or to organize a voluntary organization having the same end in view. This last may sometimes be the best line to pursue, though in that case endeavor should be made to secure friendly relationship with, if not also the active cooperation of, the local authority. But often the most hopeful plan is to fight the local elections and to secure the election on local governing bodies of men and women who will give those bodies no peace until the necessary reforms are secured.

If we are to be helpful we must be kindly and charitable in our criticism of local authorities. Nothing has made it so difficult to secure good men and women to undertake the burden of local government as the indiscriminating and uncharitable criticism aimed at those engaged in it. Criticism of members of our central and local governing bodies is not seldom deserved; but critics are too often those who will give no assistance in the work which, with insufficient knowledge, they vilify. When we hear of scandal in administration, let us have a sense of proportion, remembering grosser corruption, evidenced for instance in Pepy's Diary, and especially remembering that the best way to remove corruption is by taking a part ourselves in the work of central or local government, or by steadily upholding those who are doing so with integrity.

The onlooker, whether it be on voluntary or on official work for the commercial good, has his duty to perform as well as the worker. It is his duty to make himself acquainted with local conditions and with local administrations, even though he takes no part in it. A chief need at the present time is an interested study by every adult of all the phases of local administration in each district; and in my view, Red Cross organizations will be rendering inestimable service to the community if they succeed in educating the public conscience to this effect. Increased local patriotism is urgently needed if the prospective fight against disease by the Red Cross societies is to succeed, and if the further triumphs of preventive medicine within our reach are to be secured. To this end enthusiasm will need to be infused into public health administration as well as into the work of voluntary agencies; and it is only by developing all the possibilities of our governing bodies as well as of voluntary societies and by securing the closest cooperation between the two that the new ideal of the Red Cross organization can be realized.